

# Looking Over the Years

## Halfway Mark of Twentieth Century Stirs Memory of Veteran Newspaperman—Bringing Nostalgic Recollections

By Robert Lincoln O'Brien

Washington was a much simpler place, residentially and officially, at the turn of the century than it is today.

On January 1, 1900, I moved into a newly built house on Cliffborne place, this side of the Calvert Street Bridge. The universal observation on my selection was on its great distance out of town. Francis E. Leupp, with whom I shared an office in the Wyatt Building, where Garfield's store now stands, told me, as I outlined my plans to him, that it might be all right for me, since I was 16 years younger than he, but that he should not want to live so far away. Senator Morrill of Vermont, who built a house somewhat earlier on Thomas Circle, relates in his memoirs that his friends thought he was a venturesome person to go so far out in the country!

Those were the days of the Washington boarding house, which seems to have been supplied by the cafeteria and the coffee shop. But in those days, "Where do you board?" was a common inquiry. I remember the man who said he had boarded at 32 different places, and while he could not say that each move had been an improvement, he would avow that it had been a change.

My friend, Frank H. Stilton, now a successful lawyer in Boston, then a Congressman's secretary, viewed his first boarding house with such disdain that when I asked him the hour that he and his companions customarily went to supper, he replied that it was "whenever they could get up the courage to face it." Like most young men of that day, he was studying law in one of the night schools. When he went up to Boston to take the examination, he assigned to me the duty of watching the Boston Transcript for the report on the results of the examination, which that newspaper was sure to print. When it became my sad duty after his first trial to report failure, he shook his head with great solemnity, to declare:

"I knew too much common law; I knew that much of the night school. I knew I could never get by, knowing so much common law as I did." When I expressed surprise that candidates failed in an examination from knowing too much, he elucidated the situation further by adding: "I mean, of course, in proportion to what I knew of other things."

### \$20 a Month Board

But the glory of the old days, if it be glory, was in its cheapness. We had six carfare tokens for a quarter. I paid \$20 a month for table board, and it was with a great deal of hesitation that the boarding house keeper on K street broke the sad news to me that she would have to lift the price to \$22 for 90 or 93 meals. And yet my next seatmate was the Assistant Secretary of War, Gen. Lewis A. Grant, known in the Union Army as "the Vermont Grant." At the next table sat the family of a reading clerk at the Senate whose wife was a sister of the first wife of Senator William A. Clark of Montana, whose gifts to the Corcoran Gallery are much in evidence.

In my early days of newspaper work, before I employed a stenographer of my own, I sought help from two sisters, public stenographers, who took dictation directly on the machine for 30 cents an hour to the elder, and 20 cents an hour to the younger. To simplify the bookkeeping I eventually consolidated the rates on 25 cents an hour. I never see the younger of the two girls today without recalling the letter which I dictated to her for a man named Gurley, which she wrote out "My dear Gurley."

### Phrases Discredited

It is astonishing how all the phrases attributed to us, like "the City of Magnificent Distances," have been discredited by events. Our distances are not great enough. A Bostonian who came here in 1900 remarked that the storekeepers of his home city did not make profit enough to keep the snow shoveled off of such ample sidewalks as we had here. That was the old-time impression. I read a severe criticism of L'Enfant in a descriptive history published in 1834, in which the writer said that L'Enfant named the streets from numbers and letters because that was all he knew.

That observation was like that of the political boob-bah of my home town of Abington, Mass., who had been a delegate to the Democratic National Convention of 1856 which had nominated Buchanan. As long as the old delegate lived, he told us that the Government could never by any possibility clear the debt resulting from the Civil War. He was only about 70 years ahead of time. Grover Cleveland, whom I served, came out with vigor against Theodore Roosevelt's reelection in 1904 because of "Republican extravagance"—spending \$1,000,000 a year. "Tom" Reed had to defend the Congress of which he had been Speaker in the House, known as the "Billion-Dollar Congress," because it had pro-

vided that sum for the expenses of the Government for two years. This is all in keeping with the fellow journalist of my youth here, who announced that he would never go again to a certain restaurant because, as he said, he was "no hand to pay 10c for a cup of coffee." I sympathized with him.

Of the need of the rebuilding of the White House, altogether symbolic of the turn of the half-century, I have had direct personal observation. I was a clerk there, under Cleveland, when all the White House offices were on the second floor, over the east room and were under the control of the Bureau of Public Buildings and Grounds. That part of the White House then infested with the greatest assortment of bugs, of the water-bug and cockroach type, that anybody ever heard of. It could have added specimens to Noah's Ark. The White House then operated a vehicle known as "the office buggy," in which Octavius L. Pruden, the assistant secretary to the President, carried to the Capitol all the messages and papers that he had occasion to transmit to Congress. A colored messenger did the driving.

One day one of the men on the staff, much of an automaton, came into these second-floor offices and with great solemnity intoned the words: "The office buggy is downstairs." To this Benjamin F. Montgomery, telegraph operator, responded: "And the buggy office is up here." The housekeeping part of the White House, under Mrs. Cleveland's control, was immaculate in its appearance and appointments, but our working spaces were pretty fierce. We had a staff of 11 persons, exclusive of occasional details such as the White House has always derived from the departments. Though an ambitious young man, I had never supposed that in the lapse of a half-century there would be a hundred persons assigned the work I was then doing. But the ratio of employees today would not be far from that.

### Days of 'Ike' Hoover

It was not until the turn of the century, on September 14, 1901, when Theodore Roosevelt became President, that the branching out of the White House



began. President Cleveland and his predecessors had talked about it, but did not get around to do anything. With the first Roosevelt, the sparks began to fly. Hardly an administration since has failed either to enlarge an existing White House office building or to build a new one. These changes have typified those in the whole Federal structure.

President Coolidge brought a personal secretary named Edward T. Clark, from Northampton, Mass., like himself a graduate of Amherst college. When Mr. Coolidge gave place to Mr. Hoover, "Ted" Clark, as we all called him, moved over to the Shoreham Building, where he became the Washington representative of the Liggett Drug Co. In both administrations there remained at the White House a man popularly known as "Ike" Hoover, who had started in as an electrician in McKinley's day and gradually worked up to a factotum of some social consequence, as shown by his recently published autobiography. One day Mr. Clark, over in his Shoreham Building office, received a letter from his chief, Louis Liggett, saying that two Louis Liggetts who had been helpful to the Liggett family in London, were going to Washington to see Mr. Clark. Mr. Clark was to be attentive to them. On arriving, the ladies announced that the one thing they wanted to see most in the entire Capital was the historic old White House. This edifice interested them immensely; could Mr. Clark get them into it? Going to an outside booth, he called up "Ike" Hoover—with whom he had associated when at the White House in the Coolidge administration, and explained to him the importance of his doing a good job in showing these ladies around.

Two hours later they came back and told Mr. Clark they had always heard of the fabled democracy of America, adding, "Here we have been shown every nook and cranny of your old White House by none other than your President himself." Ike always wore a long Prince Albert coat and his name was Hoover. What more was necessary?

I told Ted that I hoped he did not spoil that story, which would otherwise go down in history with Jefferson's tying his horse when he rode to the Capitol for his inauguration—also reported by an Englishman. But Ted, more honest perhaps than I would have been, did disillusion the ladies by acknowledging that they had been

escorted by Ike Hoover, who was not the President.

The President used to do a large business shaking hands with the public twice a week. It was a boring experience, but up to the turn of the century every President had tolerated it. I had boarded, when I was teaching school in Natick, Mass., at the same place with a middle-aged woman, who had told us, on Mr. Cleveland's election in '84, that she knew all about him, etc. I wondered a little whether her claims were exaggerated, but they were not. At one of these receptions I started to introduce her to the President. He stopped me abruptly by saying, "Don't tell me this lady's name; she is old Squire Cadwell's daughter."

### One Trip Outside U. S.

I knew that Grover Cleveland was right because she had a son named Cadwell Tyler, who lived in this town for many years and may be remembered by some of The Star readers.

Later, at the cemetery in Holland Patent, N. Y., I saw the lots adjoining of the Cadwell-Tyler family and the Cleveland family, the latter including cenotaphs of two older brothers of Grover Cleveland who had been lost at sea coming back from one of the West Indies islands, where they had operated a hotel. Grover Cleveland went there to settle up their business affairs and this proved the longest trip outside of the continental United States that he ever made. He never went to Europe. He never visited the West Coast. Such an attitude on the part of a President, at the turn of the century, is only illustrative of the great changes that have come over our national life in the half-century under review.

### Cleveland Fishing Trip

Most of Mr. Cleveland's traveling had been in attending funerals. This, I fancy, was a hangover from his upbringing in a Presbyterian manse. I went with him to President Hayes' funeral at Fremont, Ohio, in January, 1893. On such an occasion he made a wonderfully good impression; his dignified bearing and long black coat and solemn demeanor fitted perfectly.

I wonder if I might tell, illustrative of the period we are reviewing, of the time that he went, while President, on a fishing trip in North Carolina, and of the publicity growing out of it. In connection with such enterprises he wanted little said. He had arranged that there should be no appointments on his desk for either Sunday or Monday, and that no one should know anything about his absence. This was his typical attitude. In great contrast with the press conference and all the publicity which now attends every step a President takes.

On Monday morning, a great English statesman's death was flashed into the newspaper offices. I think it was Gladstone. Two men came up to the White House from the Associated Press to get what was then, as now, curiously known as "the President's reaction." The object of the second man was to impress the President with seriousness with which the Associated Press viewed the guest, while Mr. Thurber, the President's secretary (I was only his stenographer).

### Strange Interview

Mr. Thurber possessed great natural courtesy. He had the graciousness of a successful undertaker. But this inquiry put him on the spot. Was he to tell the Associated Press that the President was in North Carolina fishing? That would never do. So he opened the door into the President's office very narrowly, being a slight man himself, and he did not want the roving eye of the Associated Press to see the aching void. He deliberately walked around the President's desk three or four times, and then came out, shaking hands again with the two reporters—another undertaker's gesture—and said, "The President feels," He did not say the President "said." Mr. Thurber was too truthful for that, but he thought he was authorized to interpret the undoubted feelings of the man whom he served; to wit, that this would be a blow to a much greater area than the empire which the English statesman had served, etc. The A. P. men sent it forward as an interview.

That afternoon, a so-called cub reporter in North Carolina ran against Mr. Cleveland at a railroad junction and asked him what he—the President—thought of the news. The latter allowed



that he hadn't heard any and would like to know what it was. Again pressed for his comments, he said he had none; that he had not known this statesman; had had no dealings with him, and did not like to give out interviews on subjects about which he knew nothing.

Sales resistance was President Cleveland's long suit. The youth's report was transmitted as an interview by the Associated Press, and the next morning the Washington Post's telegraph deskman was confronted with two recorded contacts, that with Mr. Thurber in the morning, and another with President Cleveland himself at 5 o'clock in the afternoon. The disk naturally wanted to print them side by side, but how should it head them up? Finally it selected words something like this: "Gradually assuaging grief of President Cleveland abates."

### 'Fort Thurber'

Our letters at the White House were in keeping with the simplicity of the era. Most of them sought offices. I remember one to Mr. Cleveland, who had been married in the White House, which brought its appeal to a climax in these words:

"Finally, Mr. President, if you should appoint me to this office it would enable me to marry and support a wife just as the presidency did you."

In those days there was an editorial writer on the Post named "Dick" Weightman, who specialized in humorous, cynical and ironical comments. Mr. Thurber, who was one of the finest gentlemen I ever knew, had ordered the erection of a little building about the size of a flagman's house at a railroad crossing near the westerly gate to the White House grounds for the man who had to keep watch during the long, cold winter nights of the President's personal safety. Perhaps the Secret Service may have ordered the building, and not Mr. Thurber, but in any event Weightman promptly christened the edifice "Fort Thurber" just as a later generation accorded to the columnist Lowell Mellett proprietary claims to the building opposite the Willard Hotel.

### Hotels Have Changed

The hotels of Washington, incidentally, have nearly all changed. The leading one when I came to town was the Arlington Hotel, on the site of the Veterans' Administration. The Willard was then what we call the Old Willard; the present structure was in building in the year 1900, and it was done by degrees. The Pennsylvania avenue frontage was built first, and what had been left of the Old Willard on the F street side was operated as the Fairfax and maintained as a separate hotel until the owners saw fit to rebuild in conformity with the Pennsylvania avenue structure. The Raleigh Hotel, I feel like saying, has "always been there." In the Civil War it was the Kirkwood Hotel, and Andrew Johnson was living there when summoned to assume the duties of the presidency.

The hotels around the Union Station are all new. There was a "Brock's Congressional Hotel" diagonally southeast of the Capitol on the site of the earliest of the present House Office Buildings.

In those days we had two railroad stations, the Pennsylvania, just south of Pennsylvania avenue on the junction of Sixth street, and the Baltimore & Ohio. On the opposite corner from the Pennsylvania stood the St. James Hotel, which was patronized largely by people from New Hampshire. The Hamilton Hotel, on the site of the present palatial edifice, was a simple structure, patronized largely by New Englanders, with some sprinkling of Iowans. Senator Frye of Maine lived there, and John D. Long of Massachusetts. When he returned as Secretary of the Navy he took an apartment in the Portland, at Thomas Circle.

Thomas B. Reed stayed at the Hamilton until becoming Speaker, when he went to the Shoreham, then on the site of the present Shoreham Building. That hotel had been built by Levi P. Morton, Vice President under Harrison, 1889-1893, who named it for the town in Vermont where he was born. Still earlier there had been the famous Wormley's Hotel, nearly opposite, on H street.

The Baltimore & Ohio Railroad Station was northwest of the Capitol, in a space so wholly absorbed by the new development in that quarter that it would take John Clagett Proctor to lead you with any exactness to the spot where it stood. It was in the Pennsylvania Railroad terminal, that President Garfield had met his death in 1881 at the hands of an assassin, as a marble tablet on the walls recorded.

We had in those days a goodly number of theaters of the spoken word, including the National, which became the last survivor. Of course, the Belasco was quite modern. There was a theater just south of the Avenue, where the Department of Commerce Building now stands, but occupying a very minute section of its ground floor space. There was one on the south side of F street near Tenth, as the architectural formation of its entrance still bears evidence.

### Newspaper Row

The newspaper correspondents of that day were largely in that block of Fourteenth street between F and the Avenue. That was a genuine "newspaper row." When I started to furnish a bureau, so-called, for the Boston Evening Transcript at the turn of the century, I was told that I could buy my furniture cheaply from the New York Times. This was before the coming of Mr. Adolph Ochs with his miraculous power. The Times had been a two-man bureau, but in a period of retrenchment had been cut down to a one-man bureau, and I bought some of the excess furniture for \$10. I was always lavish in my expenditures. Today the Transcript is no longer in existence, while the New York Times maintains in Washington, under the leadership of Arthur Krock, a larger staff of writers than the Boston Transcript then employed in all its activities.

At the turn of the century, or slightly before, one of the great sights for visiting children was to take them on the horse-cars to Georgetown, via Dupont Circle and P street, where they could see the horses unharnessed about where the P street bridge now stands, and a new pair brought into service.

### Yardstick for Doctors

Fifty years ago physicians here were customarily identified by the prominent persons who had died under their ministrations. If you sought a new doctor for your arthritis or your cold, you were promptly regaled with the great statements who had died under such a physician; why not go to him? In my first search for a physician here I was the recipient of a very delicate courtesy. I came down with old-fashioned diphtheria, as adults frequently did before the days of antitoxin. The boarding house smuggled me off into a top-floor room, otherwise unoccupied, which had just one framed picture about a foot square on its walls. When I recovered, I complimented the boarding house keeper on the attention she had extended to me in having on the wall of my room a solitary picture, that of a man who had died of diphtheria—Phillips Brooks, the Episcopal Bishop of Massachusetts and the greatest pulpit orator of his time. My physician had been the one under whom Mrs. Harrison and Secretary Gresham had died. I have forgotten his name. For a bad cold I was helped out by the doctor under whom Senator Leland Stanford of California succumbed.



# District's Planning Traced

## Many Individuals Have Had a Hand in Reshaping the Layout of Washington Since L'Enfant's Plan Was Submitted

By U. S. Grant, 3d,  
Major General, U. S. A., Retired  
Former Chairman of National Capital  
Park and Planning Commission

We owe it to the personal interest and wisdom of our first President, George Washington, that the site of the Nation's Capital was a favorable one and that the new city was given a plan, designed with art and skill.

The act of Congress moving the seat of the Federal Government from Philadelphia to Washington was signed April 24, 1800, and the move was completed during the following summer. When the hundredth anniversary of this event occurred, the development of our cities had already become a major problem of public interest, and hundreds of thousands of Americans had been inspired by the planned architectural beauty of the World's Fair in Chicago in 1893. It was not clear to the man in the street why our cities could not be so planned and why we Americans had to live in chaotic and sordid surroundings that had grown like Topsy in nearly every American city.

The Centennial celebration of the city of Washington in 1900 focused the attention of the entire country on its capital and the question of whether the L'Enfant plan, mutated, disfigured, or "still persisted" in the minds of those who called them to deal with the larger affairs of the District of Columbia, both in Congress and among the citizens—should be abandoned. Many interesting and ingenious plans were proposed for Washington's beautification and further development.

Chairman McMillan of the Senate Committee on the District of Columbia, became deeply interested and assumed leadership. He secured the appointment of a commission of outstanding artists and planners—Daniel Burnham, Augustus St. Gaudens, Charles McKim and Frederick Law Olmsted, Jr.—to study the needs of the city and report what they considered the proper development for its parks and public buildings. Although the subject of their report was thus restricted to matters essentially of concern to the Federal Government, their studies inevitably had to consider the city as a whole and their recommendations outlined the framework for development of the regenerated National Capital.

### Inspired Projects

As Charles Moore later so well said, "had the Commission been composed of small minds, doubtless they would have started off to create something original. As it was, they began with a careful study of the L'Enfant plan as approved by Washington and Jefferson, and thereby they added to their own work the prestige of the founders." As a magnet placed under a mass of unrelated iron filings brings the particles into symmetry and beauty, so under these organizing minds in close consultation, the disordered elements in the District of Columbia fell into their proper relations one with another. After a short and strenuous trip abroad to the most beautiful cities of Europe, which helped check their notions with the actual results there, the report was prepared (Senate Document 166, 57th Congress, 1st session) and a quarter of a century their recommendations were the accepted guide for those working on the city's development.

The protection of the Mall against new encroachments, the Lincoln Memorial, the Grant Monument, the adoption of the Rock Creek-Potomac parkway and the Arlington Memorial Bridge projects, the new Union Station with the removal of the railroad from the Mall, the establishment of a commission of fine arts—all were inspired by that commission and its recommendations. But these were all Federal projects. Practically nothing was done to carry out its other park projects and to co-ordinate the growth of the greater Capital of the now full-grown Nation. Moreover, during that first quarter of the 20th century, the automobile arrived and came into general use, enlarging the potential area of urban development fivefold and initiating the traffic problems of today.

### Planning in 1924

Fortunately, the construction of the Cairo Apartments brought about the act of 1910 limiting the height of buildings, so that Washington was saved from that municipal economic incubus, very high buildings, with the resulting costs of municipal services and Washington real estate values. The act of 1910 was one of the first cities to adopt a zoning ordinance in 1920.

The first World War brought with it another sudden influx of population, with a housing shortage in its train, not only for habitation but also for Government buildings. The new housing, following the old 1888 highway plan, started the destruction of the topographical character and beauties of the outlying areas of the District and added, by the grading required, a large increment of cost to every acre. Moreover, the lack of parks and playgrounds for the spreading population made imperative demands. The pleas of interested citizens, particularly the Committee of 100 and the American Civic Association, of national professional societies like the American Institute of Architects, and of wise and foresighted legislators, at last obtained a hearing.

In response to the growing pressure and obvious needs, Congress in 1924 established a National Capital Park Commission, which was enlarged in 1926 by the addition of "four eminent citizens well qualified and experienced in city planning," and transformed into the National Capital Park and Planning Commission. While this commission has chiefly advisory powers and little or no authority, it has made

a real contribution to the orderly and intelligent growth of the city and its suburbs, and has made available to the National Capital, without cost, the professional experience and judgment of the country's leading planners. By bringing together around the same table these outstanding planners and the chief constructing officials, it has been able to find reasonable and practical solutions to most of the city's planning problems during the quarter century of its existence. In addition, as Jesse C. Nichols, the successful developer of Kansas City and for 21 years volunteer member of the commission, recently said "perhaps some of the greatest achievements of the District."

### City Planners

Congress has recognized some of these needs and has provided for them, at least in part, by increasing the District's tax base, increasing the Federal contribution to the District budget, and passing a very sound redevelopment law. Action under the latter, however, has been frustrated by opposition that seems to be misinformed, and the increase in taxes and the Federal contribution are not sufficient to make progress possible as fast as needed.

### Two States Involved

It is an outstanding fact that the seat of the Federal Government is no longer contained within the District of Columbia and that the urgent problems of the Nation's Capital are now those of a major metropolitan area extending into the two adjacent States. Besides the obvious local needs already mentioned, certain other requirements are recognized and there is reason to expect that the Commission's recommendations to meet them will be substantially in accord with the following:

1. The limitation of Federal employment, which as the city's major industry to a great extent determines its growth, and its redistribution in the central area by the construction of new Federal buildings, in which to house the employees now in temporary or rented offices, along the central axis and on both sides of East Capitol street, and the centralized location of activities that do not, for urgent administrative reasons, have to be in frequent contact with the Capitol and the White House.

### Highway Needs

2. The extension of Constitution and Independence avenues to the Anacostia River, and connection of the former with the Baltimore-Washington Parkway.
3. The construction of the Fort drive for the exchange of traffic between existing arterial streets and better accessibility to the further-out residential areas.
4. The eventual development of an inner circumferential route with express highway characteristics around the central area to receive and distribute traffic in the congested central area.
5. The adoption of a thoroughfare plan and the improvement of traffic conditions on such thoroughfares by the gradual step-by-step development of expressway characteristics thereon, as is contemplated in the K street project already begun.

6. The development of the joint executive plan for the suburbs, and the construction of roads and bridges as needed in accordance therewith.

### New Airport Required

7. Provision of off-street parking in the central area.
8. Provision of a new commercial airport and of a system of airfields for privately owned planes.
9. Adoption and step-by-step execution of the comprehensive waterfront and river-improvement project proposed by the United States District engineer.

10. Additions to the District of Columbia sewage-disposal plant and other requirements for a co-ordinated metropolitan sewerage and water supply system.

### Completion of the park, parkway and playground system.

- (12) Study of the large tracts of land now in public or institutional use, with a view to determining their best use and their proper function in the Metropolitan Area.
- (13) Adoption of a public transportation plan for guidance in making changes, based on recognition of the fact that for economic reasons new streetcar lines will not be built but that the present investment in rail traffic should be used as long as economically justified. This should include study of the possibility of establishing suburban railroad service.

### Tax Base Increased

- (14) Adoption of a comprehensive plan for school construction and the best use of existing school properties.
- (15) Immediate initiation of urban redevelopment under the D. C. Redevelopment Act of 1945, and construction of dwellings for persons of low income, which are so urgently needed.
- (16) Revision and modernization of the District of Columbia zoning regulations and map, and mutual co-ordination of zoning in the suburbs with that in the District of Columbia.

### Construction of an auditorium with special facilities for opera and concerts, and of a stadium as part of the recreation center at the end of East Capitol street.

- (17) Construction of a fair and just policy for Federal financial help to the proper development of the Metropolitan Area, so that the Nation's Capital may be worthy of the Nation and a thoroughly efficient dwelling for its Government.



L'ENFANT.



GEN. GRANT.



SENATOR McMILLAN.